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THE HEROIC PERIOD
IN THE HISTORY OF
THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

A Discourse

DELIVERED IN THE EDIFICE OF SAID CHURCH

ON ITS

25th ANNIVERSARY,

✓ BY

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FOR 15 YEARS ITS PASTOR.



WASHINGTON, D. C.
HOWARD UNIVERSITY PRESS,
1894.

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*THE HEROIC PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
WASHINGTON, D. C.*

My Christian Friends, I suppose I am here, to-night, where for fifteen years I preached the Gospel of God's forgiving love, largely because after five years of absence, God has honored me with a position, which makes me again a resident of a city, dearer to me than any other city in the world. I have selected a text, from which I think, I once preached in this pulpit. It is the charge, which the Jews of Thessalonica made against Paul and Silas, and is found in Acts, 17th chapter and the 6th verse: "These men that have turned the world up side down have come hither also."

It is a great thing to know the genesis of an enterprise; of an institution; when and why it was born; and what is its reason for being; why should it not go back to the womb of night and be no more. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God gives us a genesis of His things. And just in proportion as a thing is of God: is managed in the fear of God, is connected with God's movements among men, man can to some extent, discover and give the genesis of it. There was no room for the Babe of Bethlehem in the inn. And it is a suggestive fact that not until the close of the war was there room for Congregationalism south of Mason and Dixon's line. Institutions were not after this order. They were feudal, not democratic. There were apparent exceptions to this, but they were not real. There was a Congregational Church in Charleston, S. C., where the colored people sat in the gallery and the white people sat in the body of the church. There were Baptist Churches, Congregational in government all over the South, but they were white Baptist and black Baptist. The Congregationalism of New England, the Congregationalism of Plymouth Rock had to wait till the fullness of time, when the seed of woman should bruise the serpent's head, to come here upon the wave of that mighty tide of heroism, which culminated at Appomatox. So that as the clouds rolled away and the shoutings of the captains

ceased and the God of battles was revealed walking upon war's surges and saying "Peace be still," then, men and women, who believe in man, as made in God's image and capable of self-government in churches, as well as in state, began to talk of a Congregational Church in Washington City. Then, landed the Mayflower at the Capitol, and here was her Plymouth Rock.

There were excellent churches here before, churches in which the best people of the North felt at home, in which they could be edified, in which they could work harmoniously, in which they often served as office-bearers. Washington had always been a religious city. But there was no church, in which were illustrated the distinctive things of Congregationalism; namely, the perfect equality of Christian brotherhood, and the entire sufficiency of each church to manage its own affairs, under Christ, as the great Head of the Church. That institution had yet to come to birth. It came to birth, and was called the First Congregational Church of Washington. To found such a church were drawn together, in the Capitol of this republic, amid shadows of feudalism, a band of Christian men and women, many of whom were worthy to be classed with heroic souls, who trod the deck of the Mayflower; for they had it in mind to link their work with that of the Pilgrims.

I shall speak of this period as "The Heroic Period in the History of this Church." I believe this may be done, without injustice to any other period, present or future, and in a true historic spirit.

First. I shall speak of the personnel of this period. Of course, I can give only a sample of them. Many of the men, engaged in this church enterprise, as already intimated, came fresh from the baptism of fire and blood on the battlefield, where they had subscribed themselves anew to be the Lord's. Some of them had written it in their own blood. There were generals, and colonels, and captains, and corporals, and privates, but all of them still aglow with the enthusiasm of having carried a great cause, the cause of humanity, the world over to a final triumphant issue! There were eventually public men, from the man occupying the second office in the gift of the people, Henry Wilson, the Natick cobbler, who died in the Capitol, and to whose last hours it was my privilege to minister, down through Senators and Representatives, to the humblest messenger in the Departments, but all of one mind, seeing eye to eye, as to this project of a church, which should recognize the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God; the doctrine that God is our Father and we are all brothers.

Never perhaps, in the history of any church enterprise were there nobler men and women associated together. They had marked individuality, but one Lord, one faith, one baptism. They came from the West and the Northwest, but especially from Maine and her sister-states of New England, the hive where the Pilgrim Fathers first made the honey of Freedom's sweetness. There was one man, who, though he is not here to-night, owing to afflictions in his family, a man, who left his right arm at Fair Oaks, but keeps his heart and head always ready to serve the cause of humanity to this day—so that apart from his military glory, his name will always be associated with that of another, bearing the same name in the Old World—there was one man, who was more than any other man to the public mind, the representative of the enterprise. How often have I heard this church called the Howard Church! He exhorted, he prayed, he gave, he begged till the success of the enterprise was assured. He put \$16,000 of his own money into it. There was another man from Maine, whose zeal, whose activity, whose self-forgetfulness, whose loyalty, whose patience and perseverance, render him worthy to be associated with this distinguished soldier, and whose name was among the first ever written upon its records; the nursing father of the enterprise: I mean Llewellyn Deane, Esq., a man, who found Gen. Howard as Andrew found Simon Peter, and told him of the enterprise. For the first nine months, this man carried the census of Congregationalists, by which this church was gathered, in his breast pocket, and by his indefatigable exertions on the ground and through the press, prepared the way for its ultimate success. He bought the ground on which this building stands. There were also Gen. Geo. W. Ballock, who was always Gen. Howard's loyal lieutenant—which is praise enough for any man—Daniel L. Eaton, the chivalric spirit, full of human love and holy zeal, who did not live to see the church's greatest triumphs, but predicted they were to come; J. W. Alvord who amid the snows of life's winter, kept up a tropical ardor of soul such as made his life to bloom all over the city in countless kindnesses to the poor and lowly, and whose petitions to God in the prayer-meeting seemed always to be like an actual knocking at the gate of Heaven; Wm. F. Bascom, the man with the Roman firmness of nature, which always made it obligatory on him to say and do what he regarded the just thing, though the heavens fell; Wm. R. Hooper, of Pilgrim name and lineage, and so long the correspondent of "The Congregationalist"; Charles H. Bliss, Eliphalet Whittlesey, whose

honored name needs neither the prefixes nor the suffixes, which eminent service to school, the state, and church, have won for it; a man as Roman as the Roman, but as pure as the Puritan, ready for any place, any title, any service to which duty called him; Wm. Russell and Silas H. Hodges, both of whom had been pastors elsewhere, both of whom were deacons here; Deacon Robinson, Deacon White, and other deacons.- Nearly all of these men had help-meets in their households, who were just as true and heroic as they were. For there were heroines, as well as heroes, in those days. And Mrs. Howard, and Mrs. Eaton, and Mrs. Bascom, and Mrs. Hooker, Mrs. Balloch and Mrs. Russell, and Mrs. Hodges and Mrs. Robinson, and Mrs. Patterson, and Mrs. White, Mrs. Whitney and Mrs. Rankin, were among the number.

These men and women, to the number of one hundred and twenty, one hundred and thirty at first, found themselves just escaped from the difference of opinion, as to whether colored people should be admitted to Communion; on which question they maintained the affirmative; an equal number or more, with the Pastor, Rev. Dr. Boynton, who maintained that this fellowship was allowable, but inexpedient, having withdrawn, and established worship on the next square. This heroic remnant was left with an unfinished edifice, no pipe-organ, and a debt of \$70,000, in a community in which Congregationalism was an exotic and a flower whose fragrance thus far had been an offence. The division, which was a matter of public notoriety, drawing the eyes of the Christian public, all over the country, took place in May, 1869. In August of the same year, the present speaker was called to the pastorate, and though kindly welcomed, he came to it with much fear and trembling. That at the end of 15 years closing June, 1884, the church had received annual accessions averaging 70 each year, and had made such advances, as to be one of the leading and most influential churches in the city and in the country, may perhaps, be attributed in some little part to leadership in the pulpit, God only knows, but certainly, was no less owing to the favor of God and the fidelity, activity and self-sacrifices of the people themselves. I can say this that I asked of them no privileges; I took none; that I gave my uttermost of time, strength and money; that I gladly took whatever of anxiety and shame, the situation often involved; and God is my witness, that, though I always loved the cause they represented better than I loved them, as I do to this day, I was ready to lay down my life for their edification or welfare.

Secondly. I shall speak of the lines of work adopted in that period for building up the church and congregation.

In one sense, the position of the church was wholly unique. It had no rigid precedents. It had only principles. The pastor was accorded the largest liberty as to methods of administration. During the 15 years of his ministry, no church-question, no society-question, ever agitated the peace or the prosperity of the congregation. I remember when after a few years of patient toil and waiting, I proposed to the church the wisdom of inviting here, the Rev. E. P. Hammond, the Evangelist, how, without any discussion, on motion of Gen. Whittlesey, one of the wisest and most conservative of men and a pastor of large experience, the church left the matter wholly to the discretion of the pastor. A company of five pastors of the city had been for five weeks praying daily, in a room now known as the Music Room of this structure, for a revival. These men, among whom were the sainted Dr. Mason Noble, and Dr. E. H. Gray; Dr. S. Domer, agreed to unite in an invitation to Mr. Hammond then in Harrisburg, to visit Washington for Evangelical work. He came, and for three months, meetings for preaching and inquiry were held in this church on every evening in the week, except Saturday; the pastor always occupied the pulpit, on Sunday morning; these other pastors, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, and a band of well organized Christians of all denominations, laboring in a daily morning prayer meeting held at the various different churches. Night after night, this house was packed to the doors. The interest was so intense, that sometimes an overflow meeting was held in the Social Room above, at the same time with the meeting in the main audience room. Every church in the city was more or less quickened; and as Dr. Noble said "Washington had not been so moved by God's Spirit in a whole generation". Some of the direct results were the addition to this church, on a single Lord's Day of 115, and during the twelve months, of 170. While for years, the second service on the Sabbath here partook of an Evangelistic nature, being usually followed by an inquiry-meeting. The people soon discovered that the church doors were always open to welcome them. Among the most faithful and successful of Christian workers, at that time, were Dr. O.F. Presbrey, Mr. and Mrs. Francis H. Smith, Mrs. C.A. Weed, Miss Mattie Hooper, Miss Cook, and the wife of the pastor. From the number of converts, Mrs. Weed organized a Young Mens' Sunday School Class, which she taught for many years. And several others did the same.

The same kind of pronounced effort, was put forth in the cause of Gospel Temperance. These church doors were thrown open to Mr. Francis Murphy, and hundreds of reformed men first took the pledge within these walls; while from the Evangelistic efforts above alluded to almost every pew in this house, became a chapel, where some soul determined, "As for me, I will serve the Lord !" Indeed I scarcely ever go into the public streets of this city to this day, when some one dose not greet me, as a redeemed man through one or the other of these agencies. And if I were asked, my sober second thought, as to the wisdom of such efforts, as a man once jealous of them and convinced against the constitutional reserve of his own nature, as well as his own aesthetic instincts, I should reply: "Let God work by whom He will work." And God forbid that His own ministers should neither go into His Kingdom, nor encourage those who are entering.

And right upon this point, I want to say a word as to the free use of God's house, on other days than Sunday, and in the interest of the community, in contradistinction from the interest of the proprietors. We bought an organ, we secured a master of it, to this end. It was a stroke of the wisest policy. It was one of the necessities of the church, with its \$70,000 of debt, that it should have a secular income from the use of its edifice. It was a necessity, which was God's opportunity, and we saw it. As a result, the people came here. And while the members of other congregations were, some of them, very severe in their strictures, sometimes justly so, as to what they regarded an improper use of this sanctuary, this will always remain true, that the common people heard the Gospel here and heard it gladly. I would rather preach to the people in a concert-hall, than to hear the echoes of my voice in an elegant church, half filled. It is a great deal easier keeping the people away from God's house, than getting them to it. It is a great deal easier dismembering the ties, which draw the common people to a place of worship then establishing them. And in this church these ties were firmly established; and the people came here and God blessed the preaching of the Gospel to them.

This church thought, not alone of its own interests. From its members, originated the idea of Howard University, the University soon taking in turn, some \$10,000 of its bonds; not at first as a University, but as a Theological Seminary, to fit preachers for laboring among the colored people. The members of this church

were also active among the founders of the Young Men's Association; and for years that Association looked to the fellowship of this church for its President and Executive officers, as well as for the sinews of spiritual warfare, while its pastor never hesitated as to giving it the earliest and the heartiest endorsement. The same was true of The Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Its ablest and purest advocates were always welcome on this platform.

In a word, this church never sought its own things but always the things of others. And that was one secret of its success.

There was another line of work done by this church. It was purely Missionary. Under the lead of such men as Gen. Howard, J. B. Johnson, J. W. Alvord, and D. B. Nichols, the colored people, who congregated at the close of the war in the camps near this city, were given systematic religious instruction. And for many years, large Sunday Schools were held, where now is Lincoln Memorial Church, superintended by John A. Cole, J. B. Johnson and others; and in what is now South Washington, superintended by O. F. Presbrey; while the Colored School established on Judiciary Square eventually found hospitality under these walls and remained here until it was translated. At no time, indeed, were not black people, yellow people, and red people welcome to the Sunday School of this Church or to its communion. And probably, there was no period during the 15 years with which this discourse has to do, when there were not from 30 to 50 colored members of this congregation; and there was a time, under Gen. Howard's administration of the University, when many of the students regularly worshiped here and sat in the gallery as white students do in other churches. These people were not here as colored people, but as belonging to the one family, which God has made of one blood, to dwell on all the face of the earth! They were here, because they had been brought up Congregationalists or felt drawn to Congregationalism, that Mother of some of the noblest of children, not a few from Oberlin, where they had been educated. Frederick Douglass was often here; B. K. Bruce and John M. Langston, Professors Mitchell and Gregory with their families, were regular attendants. And their presence was felt to be an honor, and an illustration of the meaning of the passage: "For by one Spirit, we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free."

Thirdly. I want to call your attention to the public and even national bearing and influence of the heroic period of this church. I believe I am speaking here, without any intention to exaggerate what

is unimportant, though it has gone by now. The Congregational pulpit of New England has always discussed the moral and religious aspects of all great public questions; though it never has neglected to foster true religion, undefiled before God the Father. From the first it was the aim of the Pastor of this period to impress the church with this New England idea of freedom of the pulpit, and the legitimate power of the pulpit, in the discussion of all such questions, so that public days were notable ones in that period. The Forefather's Day, after the present speaker was installed, was celebrated by a New England dinner, in which Senator Patterson, of New Hampshire, and Judge Poland, of Vermont, and Senator Pomeroy, of Kansas, and Frederick Douglass, Senator at large, were among the speakers. And the themes discussed were the great historic themes, which agitated the bosom of such men as John Milton and John Hampden and the early forefathers of New England. And night after night, at this season of the year, were addresses often delivered by different members of this congregation, and none was better able to furnish competent speakers, for during this period, there were lawyers many and doctors some, and at one time twenty-three ministers enrolled among its number, on the Pilgrim Idea! On the Forefathers Day referred to, Frederick Douglass discussed his Pilgrim Fathers, who landed in Virginia; so that we got, not only the lights but the shadows of the occasion. And on Thanksgiving Day, this edifice was year after year packed to the ceiling.

I have spoken in passing, of the kind of material, which made up the congregation. They were men cast in the heroic mould, and women of the same type. But, they were, a large proportion of them, men. Two thirds, I would say, as I remember their faces. There were hosts of young families, with a scarcely a pledge or prophecy, of the young people, who now constitute the beauty and hope of this church; and whom the present Pastor has the pleasant duty of leading in green pastures and beside still waters. And these people had studied recent national events in the light of history and in the light of Congregational history in Old England and New England. And their boast was "Whose were the fathers!" And their religion meant not only their own salvation, but the salvation of their country. not only their own peace with God, but their country's peace with God. And they believed that was on the basis of righteousness. There sat the great war-governor of Connecticut; the President of the First National Congregational Council, in Boston, convened there

in 1865, in part by the resolutions of the Congregational ministers of the great Northwest, phrased as follows :

"Whereas, by the present war, the structure of society and of ecclesiastical organization is being dissolved or greatly changed, and the shackles are being struck from millions of slaves, and whereas, vast regions and populations are being opened to the free thought, free speech and free missions ; and whereas, ideas and emigration from the Free States are likely to follow the triumph of the Union cause Southward ; therefore, resolved that it is the duty of the Congregational Churches of the United States, to inquire what is their obligation, in this vast and solemn crisis, such as comes only once in ages, and what new efforts, measures and policies, they may owe to this condition of affairs, this new genesis of nations." And the thoughts that were working in Governor Buckingham's mind were working in the minds of hundreds of others in this city, and all over the country. And Congregationalism was in Washington, in answer to this inquiry. It was not here, as an ornamental appendage to other Christian denominations, nor as a competitor among them, born out of due time. It was not here, merely, as a convenience to a Congregational constituency, who happened to be sojourners. It was here on a holy errand, to hold up the standard of truth, and of righteousness, according to the heroic idea of Congregationalists, in Old England and New England.

Bengel, in his comment on the passage, which I have selected as a text: "These men that have turned the world up side down have come hither also," says, "The charge was a mistake, a slander." It was no mistake, no slander. It was the truth, and in confirmation of the great Captain of Salvation, Himself: "I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword." Congregationalism did just here what the Jews complained that it was doing in their day, for I think Paul and Silas were Congregationalists. It turned the world up side down. When Congregationalism came to Washington, Howard University was an impossibility. It not only created it, but created the sentiment here, which was needed to sustain it, and which has sustained it. I remember well the time, when it was quite common to call this church the "nigger church," or as one of the more euphoniously inclined Protestant pastors styled it, the "Dolly Varden" church. And this edifice was the only one, where Howard University could hold its anniversary for many long years. Our Methodist friends are about to found a great University in this city, where it

is very properly proclaimed, that colored people are to be admitted, as freely as any other. Howard University will welcome such an institution. It is an institution after its own type. Nor will it be jealous of its professed purpose. If colored men are happier there, we say let them go there. But this speaker remembers the time, when, on a visit here of the Evangelical Alliance, a body having representatives from the whole world, the pastor of the most popular Methodist Episcopal church in the city, waited on him, to request that Bishop Campbell, a colored delegate from the gentleman's own denomination, might speak from this platform, as it would be offensive, if a colored man, though a Methodist and a Bishop, should speak in the edifice, where he himself presided. And speak here, he did, with such a man as Dr. William Arnot, of Edinburgh, who had just visited Dr. Gallaudet's Deaf-Mute College, and there derived a beautiful illustration of the office of the Holy Spirit, as the Interpreter, of which he gave us the benefit.

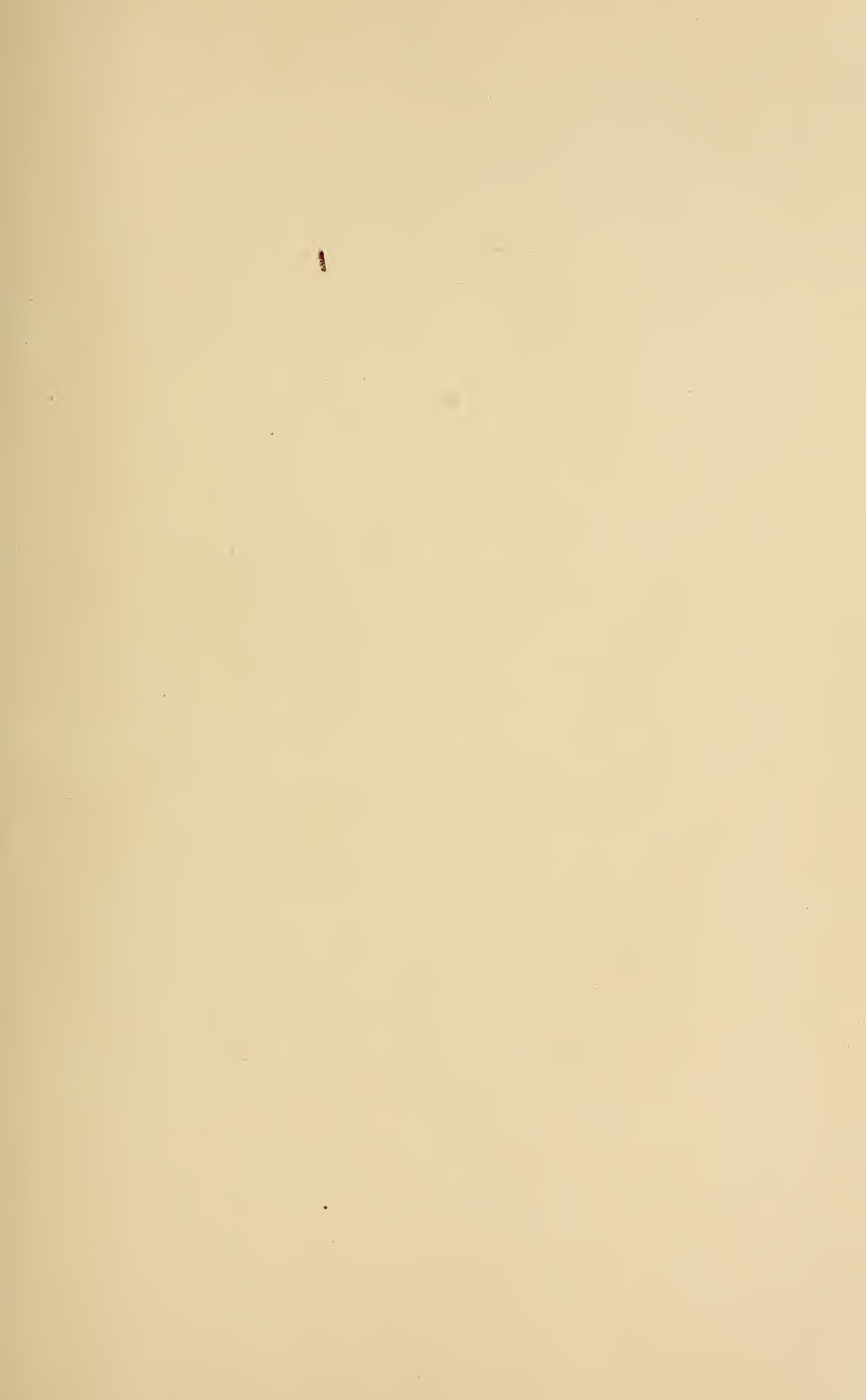
God gave it to this church, in that heroic period, when such testimony was especially needed here and everywhere, to prove to this city and to the country that it was possible to realize Christ's own idea in founding a church, where all distinction should be forgotten in the presence of the Being, who has made of one blood all nations and who by the shedding of the same blood, has redeemed all nations. And this will always be among the sacred memories of the Pastor of that period, that the first person whom he ever baptised in the presence of the emblems of the death of the Son of man, in this church, was a colored man, who his predecessor thought it was expedient should go elsewhere, and the last pastoral office of this kind performed by him, was the baptism of an infant, in one of the same families, the stormy night before he left the city.

My Dear Christian Friends, I speak of these things, not as especially important except as matters of history, just as the old soldier shoulders his crutch and fights battles over again. I see only here and there, one among you who knows much about such questions or cares much about them now. They are almost as far from your mind and thought, as the landing of the Pilgrims. In ten more years, the last man who participated in these events, will have passed away.

Twenty five years ago, this church was pleading for very existence, was asking contributions, all over the country, for help to establish a church, according to the Pilgrim idea. Later the members, who were drawn to it, in spite of the bitter controversy which had divid-

ed it, in spite of the denominational and social prejudice, in spite of its daring and heroic positions upon all questions of progress and reform, later its members, for a half-generation, were standing beneath its heavy burdens, that their successors might be heirs of your present blessings and responsibilities. I am told you think of moving uptown. If you could do it, if you could hold on here where you are among the common people and where the common people need you, it seems to some of us, that it might be well. It is not many days since Gen. Howard said to me : "Remember, that when I am gone, I ask only one monument, the completed tower of the First Congregational Church in Washington." But if on the uplifting tide of business you are borne away from this site, if because your property is so valuable you can not afford to occupy it, remember, that you have this property in trust for the best uses, to which it can be put; not for yourselves and your children alone, but for this great city, yes, for those, who shall come to this city, when the present period of your church history shall be completed, and others shall occupy your places as you now occupy the place of those, who have gone before you. Remember that you have your name and heritage here, only because those who have gone before you, counted not their reputation, their fortunes, their lives dear to them, if a church of their own fair New England, might lift up its walls beneath the shadow of the Capitol. And remember, too, of whom it was said in prophecy: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." "And let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!"





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